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CHINESE PORCELAINS

THE NICKERSON COLLECTION AT THE ART INSTITUTE, CHICAGO

American patrons of art have of late years been casting their benefactions in a more and more marked degree on two special lines—the establishment of scholarships and prizes for the encouragement of home talent and the bestowal upon the masses, through the medium of public or semi-public institutions, of those treasures of art which it is the prerogative of wealth to accumulate. The wisdom of this policy is manifest. The prizes established may not be valuable in point of dollars and cents, but they do furnish an incentive to good work. The productions submitted in competition are passed on by juries presumably competent and fair-minded, the aspirants are rated by merit, and the medalist acquires a rank that may be beneficial to him in his future career. The transfer of private collections to public institutions, likewise, militates against the spirit of selfish hoarding for personal delectation, and the art works, virtually made public property, become a potent factor in general culture.

Among benefactions of this latter sort, one of the most important for many years is the gift of the Nickerson collection to the Art Institute of Chicago, made last February, and to be thrown open to the public the latter part of the present month. The gift, when made, was widely heralded, and the public has been expectantly awaiting the completion of the work of installation. That work is now finished, and the collection occupies two rooms specially prepared and decorated for its reception. The fittings are all in admirable taste and the treasures in their new home show to the best advantage.

The value of the collection, which comprises over a thousand pieces, is largely a matter of conjecture. The gift was made with an utter absence of ostentation. There were no conditions, no “ifs” or “musts.” Mr. and Mrs. Samuel M. Nickerson, after years of research

and the expenditure of a fortune, simply gave their collection to the Institute, stipulating only that the articles they transferred should be given ample space for their proper display, and that they themselves, as the donors, should be accorded the privilege of bearing the expense of suitably fitting up the rooms. This utter elimination of petty restrictions is especially commendable.

The collection comprises oil paintings, water-colors, etchings, and engravings; Japanese prints, Kakémonos and leather; Chinese water-colors, jade, crystals, and other hard stones; Japanese and cinabar lacquer, Chinese and Nabeshima porcelains, and Japanese pottery; bronzes and a wealth of other Oriental works of art. There is scarcely an article that has not been selected with good judgment and discrimination. There is, however, a marked difference in the quality of the different classes of articles shown in the two exhibition-rooms. The cream of the collection is to be found in the jades, crystals, and smaller articles of Oriental workmanship, the paintings, as a whole, being the least notable productions displayed.

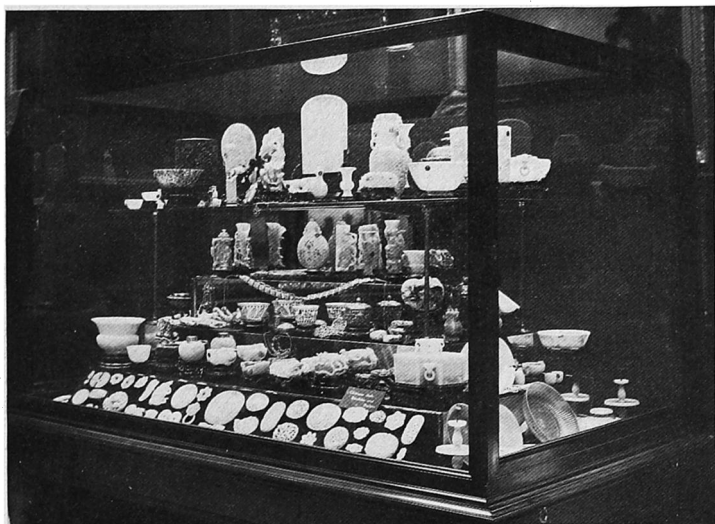
The Art Institute is signally fortunate in securing these treasures, since the jades comprised in the Nickerson gift constitute the largest and most costly collection of this particular class of art works outside of China itself. The gift, therefore, in this regard is unique. Here-



JAPANESE BUDDHIST SHRINE
Black Lacquer with Metal Mountings

tofore the best collections of jades in this country have been in private houses, where they have been kept for the inspection of the privileged few. The Nickerson gift makes the largest and most costly collection in America virtually the property of the American public.

There have been skeptics as to the value of jade as a material for art productions, but its beauty and durability have stood the test of thousands of years in China and India, and its popularity, amounting almost to veneration, in these countries makes such a collection as that now owned by the Art Institute one of the greatest importance.



CASE OF JADE

Of the mineral jade, the pure white variety has always been the most highly prized, though the varieties verging from white into gray and green have been deemed of great value. So precious was the pure white jade considered that large, flawless pieces were reserved for the Chinese emperor and were given into the hands of the most celebrated artists of the country, who spent years in shaping them into works of art. Many of the rare specimens looted from the summer palace at Peking, in October, 1860, for instance, represented twenty or thirty years of ceaseless toil at the hands of eminent Chinese artists. The Nickerson exhibit comprises fine specimens of all the varieties of jade used in the Orient. It also contains many specimens of highly executed jadeite, this crystalline form of the

mineral being a silicate of sodium and aluminum, whereas jade proper is a silicate of calcium and magnesium.

These specimens of jade, of which there are one hundred and seventeen listed in the catalogue, are of Chinese and East Indian workmanship, and present the precious mineral in most of the forms into which it is commonly worked. Over forty of the specimens are of the white variety so highly prized in the East. Many others are of the buff, gray, and yellow varieties, and the rest are of various shades of green. All are beautifully executed and almost without



THE OLD CASTLE

By Georges Michel

blemish. This is the more remarkable from the fact that many of the pieces are extremely old, one Chinese white jade saucer, for instance, bearing the mark of Kea-tsing, 1522-1567. Some of the pieces are from the Rossetti collection, London, and others from the Brayton Ives collection.

The specimens of crystals and other hard stones, which were worked both in India and China, the style determining their nativity, are equally choice. They include crystals of various colors, sard, sardonyx, murrhine, lapis lazuli, jasper, and mocha, or "moss agate," though the number of rock-crystals and Indian murrhine agates predominates. One piece, a Chinese engraved rock-crystal libation-cup, elaborately carved and bearing the seal-mark of Ch'ien-lung, 1723,

comes from the emperor's summer palace; other fine specimens come from Hamilton Palace and the Mary J. Morgan collection. For the most part the pieces are of the oldest and best workmanship, the modern specimens being comparatively few in number.

Of the one hundred and eighty-eight listed specimens of Japanese and cinnabar lacquer, there are few that are not of the choicest kind. Many of them are exquisitely carved and decorated with inlaid mother-of-pearl, gold-stone, and ivory; the characteristic decorative designs are chaste in style and the finish in every particular is flawless.



THE ARAB SCOUTS

By Ad. Schreyer

The porcelains, gathered from the most diverse sources, as were the lacquers and jades, comprise pieces of great antiquity, dating in many instances back to the early years of the fifteenth century. Others are of recent date, and show the best type of present-day work. They are in the main of the familiar blue-and-white hard paste porcelain, on which dragons and lotus-blossoms, leaf and cloud effects, plants, birds, butterflies, and the whole array of fantastic shapes dear to Chinese fancy are executed with the daintiest precision.

Many of the pieces of porcelain and pottery have long been famous among connoisseurs, having previously formed a part of the collections of Charles A. Dana, the king of Holland, Brayton Ives, Austin Robertson, the Comte de Semalle, Mary J. Morgan, Count Kleczkowski, Samuel Colman, and Blenheim Castle. The bronzes are of equal antiquity and are equally choice in point of workmanship,

a number of them dating back to 1426, and few of them being of recent make.

Second in interest, perhaps, to the carvings and pottery are the great Japanese Buddhist shrine in black lacquer with metal mountings and the fine selection of Japanese prints with their wealth of decorative imagery. These latter range in date from 1765 to recent years, and are by some of the most celebrated artists of the Mikado's empire. The reproduction given herewith affords some idea of their delicacy and uniqueness.

As said before, the paintings of the collection, though comprising some of high order, are its least important feature. Among them are early Bonheurs and Bouguereaus, characteristic Schreyers and Corots, canvases by Daubigny, Michel, Rico, Max, Clays, Tadema, and other artists of equal note. Comparatively few American canvases are in the collection, though we find Bierstadt, Church, Inness, Hart, Gifford, and a few others represented. The three paintings reproduced herewith are among the best. A few approach dangerously near mediocrity, but the average does credit to the institution in which they find a permanent home.

ARTHUR HEWITT.



RIVER SCHELD, NEAR ANTWERP
By P. J. Clays